

Public Wi-Fi helps Hertfordshire bring community together post-COVID



Hertfordshire, known for its historic estates and beautiful countryside, lies within easy commuting distance of Greater London. As the local authority, Hertfordshire County Council delivers services to 1.2 million residents, including adult and child social services, public health, road and transportation safety, community protection, and libraries.

Hertfordshire County Council is upgrading the Wi-Fi network at more than 300 government offices and community hubs not only to provide residents with a secure, safe, and welcoming environment, but also to engage the community post-COVID.

OVERVIEW

Company	Hertfordshire County Council
Industry	Government and Non-Profit
Products Used	AP45, Wireless (Wi-Fi) Assurance
Region	EMEA

CUSTOMER SUCCESS AT-A-GLANCE

58,000

Business supported

Over 300

Government-run offices and community hubs refreshed with Juniper AP45

AIOps

To help streamline network operations and troubleshooting tasks

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Network-related trouble tickets since deploying Juniper wireless

CHALLENGE

Engage the community post-COVID

The Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) was exploring ways to create a secure, safe, and comfortable environment for its residents after the isolation of COVID. As in many communities, the pandemic had taken its toll on mental health, and the Council wanted to create community hubs where people could visit and engage.

“We are trying to improve people’s mental health in the community by trying to give back the sense of togetherness in our people-centric community centre.” says Mark McCullough, Network Manager at HCC. “During lockdown, people felt isolated and vulnerable as they sensed they were losing their bonds with those around them.”

Public Internet access has long been available in Hertfordshire libraries, social centers, and other community hubs, but slow wireless LAN was not fit for the expanded community engagement objectives.

With a small IT team responsible for a large network (over 12,000 connections and 8,500 users) that serves citizens, government offices, and libraries, HCC needed a modern, easily managed wireless network.




SOLUTION

Marvis is an AIOps helpmate

After a year of testing, HCC chose Juniper wireless networking for its next-generation Wi-Fi network. Juniper wireless access points work in conjunction with the Juniper Mist cloud architecture driven by Mist AI™ to deliver network user experiences that are reliable, predictable, and measurable.

“Juniper was seen as the leader in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for Enterprise Wired and Wireless LAN Infrastructure at the time when we were looking. Also, Juniper did not press us for engagement on our PoC and they left us to it. As a result, we felt no ‘salesy’ pressure and our perception was they had total confidence in the technical capabilities in their product. We also went with the 2S support model, which gave us Marvis AI assistant on top. We got this at a decent price which undercut the offering from other suppliers over 3 years. Juniper has developing their AI system for longer than other competitors, we felt we would be in better hands with their system”.

With over 300 sites to refresh, the IT team have particularly appreciated Juniper’s ease of deployment. The Juniper AP45 Access Points fit neatly into the existing mounting brackets at the council’s locations, the team used a mobile app to simply scan QR codes on the APs and set them using the Juniper Mist cloud.

AI-driven operations with Juniper Mist Wi-Fi Assurance cloud service and the Juniper Marvis Virtual Network Assistant streamline network operations. IT sets up key wireless experience metrics, and Wi-Fi Assurance automatically tracks them and optimizes the Wi-Fi.

When problems arise, Marvis is ready to proactively identify and resolve issues to stop the network blame game. For instance McCullough notes that Marvis quickly pinpointed some hidden DNS problems during HCC’s Wi-Fi testing phase.


OUTCOME

Transform community connections

Juniper’s wireless access solution delivers real-time insights into the exact performance and service levels that mobile users and devices are experiencing. It automates corrective action with network self-tuning that identifies and fixes problems before they can negatively impact user sessions. As a result, no network-related trouble tickets have been raised at HCC sites with the new Juniper wireless. But more important than a quiet helpdesk is the impact of better connectivity on the community.

“We are trying to encourage people to come back together,” says McCullough. “It’s essential for us to have good technology like Juniper in our community hubs to improve the mental health of our community.”

With Juniper, Hertfordshire residents have access to faster wireless Internet in libraries, community centers, and other public buildings. Residents can come to their community hubs to meet likeminded people, volunteer, or sign up for a garden allotment. They can get social care for their children, older relatives, or family members with disabilities as well as help with the rising cost of living.

McCullough notes that the Council’s 8,500-strong staff will also benefit from office Wi-Fi that is faster, more secure, and supports more mobile devices. IT staff can be more productive, too, with an AI-driven network that delivers proactive insights and actions for continuous, high-quality user experiences.

With most of HCC’s workforce working from home during the pandemic, many are now adopting a hybrid working style. Having good workplace Wi-Fi is essential for workers and this can often encourage workers to engage in frequent office visits, because they know they will have a stable and reliable internet connection. McCullough adds: “It’s important to maintain good contact with our colleagues and be physically present in the office at times. Having good connectivity in the workplace is another benefit of physically coming in to the workplace.”



“Marvis is very clever. Our service desk can use it to diagnose problems in real time without using any esoteric language. Building expressions to focus on a problem gives us an advantage, but even the simplicity to type in a client name to get useful stats for any immediate issues is much easier, as we can get immediate insights into what is causing the problem.”

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